



Interviewing for Ministerial Positions



Ministry Referral Office
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
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The challenge of determining mutual compatibility between a congregation and a minister is an awesome task. It is a process involving a considerable amount of time, many factors, and a great deal of communication. The interview is one of the crucial steps in the process. Through the interview the minister and the congregation can start to learn about each other and share vital information with each other. It facilitates the process of determining the potential for establishing a positive, compatible relationship for effective ministry.

The PURPOSE of the Interview

The primary goal of the interview is to determine compatibility. Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, both the congregation and the minister are trying to determine if they will be able to serve together in a relationship of cooperative ministry and mutual growth.

When you participate in an interview, the interviewer is trying to determine if you, the ministerial candidate, are indeed God's person for the vacant ministry position. What kind of person are you? Do you possess the gifts and skills required to serve effectively in this ministerial role? What indicates to the interviewer that you are the "right" person for the position?

At the same time, your objective should not be to "win" the interview, but to use it as a means of helping you determine if this ministry opportunity is the right one for you. What opportunities for ministry will it provide? Do these opportunities match your gifts and calling? Above all, is this the place where God would have you serve?

Remember the BASICS

Establishing the right atmosphere for, and developing an appropriate relationship during, the interview will help you and the interviewer better evaluate the potential for future ministry together. This should not be a mechanical process. There are, however, several procedures and steps which will help facilitate the process and assist all participants as they seek God's will.

- **Begin your preparation with prayer**

Pray that the interview experience will help lead you to a clearer understanding of God's specific place of service for you.

- **Understand the host/guest relationship**

The interviewer is the host. You are the guest. Although the interviewer will be primarily responsible for the flow of the interview, you will help control the content. Think in advance about what you want to communicate.

- **You are "sharing" yourself**

You are not trying to "sell yourself," as some would suggest. Instead, you are trying to communicate who you are as a minister – your calling, gifts, skills, personality, experience, strengths, goals, etc. – in ways that your résumé cannot communicate.

- **Remember the importance of first impressions**

The interviewer will make some assumptions about you based, in part, upon first impressions. These assumptions may not be accurate if there is any sense of awkwardness or nervousness as the interview begins. Remember to begin with a warm greeting, good eye contact, and a firm handshake. And don't forget to smile.

- **Present yourself honestly**

Don't try to oversell or undersell yourself. Without overemphasizing either, you should be honest about both your strengths and your weaknesses. You want to be truthful, but you don't have to be blunt. Let sincerity and openness characterize your communication. In doing so the interviewer will, hopefully, do likewise.

- **Enter the interview with the right attitudes**

Think about the interviewer as much as yourself. Try to take a personal interest in him. It will help you relax and develop rapport. Communicate with courtesy and tact. Make sure your interest and enthusiasm are readily apparent.

BEFORE the Interview

Preparation is a key part of the interview process. There are several things you will want to do in advance to enable you to communicate effectively with the interviewer. Adequate preparation will also assist you as you try to learn more about the church and the ministry opportunity.

- **Begin with a time of self examination**

Review your call to ministry. Think about your gifts, skills, and goals for ministry. Evaluate how your experience in, and preparation for, ministry relate to the position for which you will be interviewing. Careful reflection on these matters will better enable you to disclose to the interviewer your true self.

- **Organize your thoughts**

Carefully review any materials you may have already received about the position, such as job description, information about the church, etc.

Think about how you would respond to questions you might be asked in the interview. (See the enclosed list entitled "Interview Questions.") You might find it helpful to write out answers to potential questions. You may also want to enlist a friend to help you role-play an interview.

- **Gather information about the church or agency**

Several sources of information can help you learn more about the church and the position for which you are interviewing. State convention annual reports (available in Southern Seminary's library) can provide some statistical information about the church's membership and financial resources. Many churches and ministry organizations have Internet web sites that provide considerable information about themselves. You may have a friend or colleague living in the area of the church who would have some personal knowledge of the congregation. If your conversations with a search committee progress considerably, you may also want to contact the director of missions in the church's association to gather additional information and insights about the church.

The Chamber of Commerce in the area in which the church is located may be able to provide some information about the community. Such information may also be available through an Internet search using the name of the city in which the congregation is located. The Internet site City-Data.com (www.city-data.com) may also be able to provide useful information about the city's size, cost of housing, the population's average income, etc.

- **Think positively**

Be reassured in the fact that the interviewer is not "out to get you." The interviewer's earnest desire is to find God's person for the vacant ministerial position, and he hopes it will be you. Remember that the interviewer also may have some anxieties about the interview.

- **Dress appropriately**

The interview should be considered a formal process. Some have suggested that you dress for an interview like you are attending a wedding. Whether or not you heed that specific advice, dress professionally and conservatively for the interview. Men should wear a coat and tie, and women should wear comparable attire. Clothes should be clean and neatly pressed. Shoes

should be polished. Neatness counts. Other items of appearance – hair, posture, smile – also matter.

- **Arrive on time**

Punctuality is important. It is best to arrive a little early. Plan to leave home in plenty of time to allow for any potential unexpected delays. Make sure you clearly understand travel directions to the location of the interview.

DURING the Interview

During the interview it is important that you try to relax as much as possible. Present your true self. Keep in mind that you are interviewing the church's representative as much as he is interviewing you. Throughout the interview be conscious of the following important items:

- **Listen with great care**

Be sure to remember the name(s) of the interviewer(s). Hear what the interviewer is saying before you respond. Try not to anticipate how you will answer until you are certain you have heard the complete question or statement. Don't hesitate to ask for clarification if you need it. You may also find it helpful to jot down some brief notes about important points.

- **Let your attitudes show**

The interviewer is wanting to speak with a candidate who is attentive, sincere, positive, interested, and enthusiastic. If you readily display those attitudes, you will do much to establish rapport and facilitate communication.

- **Respond appropriately**

Your responses to questions should be tactful and to the point. In all of your responses remember to speak clearly and in a voice that communicates humble confidence. You may need to pause briefly to think before you answer a question. Make certain that your answer relates to the question. If needed, you may want to ask for clarification. You might need to restate a question in your own words to make certain you understand what is being asked. Elaborate enough to respond fully, but don't try to embellish your responses.

When commenting on any negative situations related to previous experience, speak factually and in a neutral tone. Do not be critical of former employers or supervisors. When discussing any past negative developments be prepared to offer a reference who

knew the circumstances and can support your explanation of the situation.

- **Ask questions at the appropriate time**

Although the interviewer's approach and the flow of the dialogue will vary with each interview, at some point you should have the opportunity to ask questions. Be prepared to ask questions that will help you learn about the ministry opportunity. It may be helpful to have your questions written down so you don't forget them. (See the enclosed list entitled "Interview Questions" for ideas regarding information about which you might want to inquire.)

The questions you ask and the way you ask them will not only provide you with useful information, but will also help inform the interviewer's impression of you. Be creative, but tactful, as you ask your questions. Do not ask personal questions or questions that are likely to put the interviewer on the defensive. Avoid asking about salary and benefits, especially during the initial interview. It is best to allow the interviewer to introduce the topic of compensation (and this is usually done at some point after the first interview). When it is discussed, be prepared to indicate a range of compensation you can realistically expect to receive. At the same time make certain the interviewer understands that it is not compensation, but determining and following God's will, which is the primary motivation in your search for a ministry opportunity.

- **Conclude the interview positively**

Follow the interviewer's lead regarding the conclusion of the interview. At the proper time, express both your appreciation for the opportunity to dialogue with him and your interest in being considered for the position. If the interviewer has not already explained the next steps in the process, you will want to ask what they will be. It will also be helpful to clarify when you might expect to hear from the interviewer. End the conversation with good eye contact, a firm handshake, a smile, and an indication that you look forward to hearing from the interviewer.

FOLLOWING The Interview

- **Pray**

Ask God for wisdom and guidance to help you discern with clarity His will regarding this potential ministry opportunity.

- **Review the interview**

Immediately after the interview, take time to review and make some notes. Record important things you will want to remember, including the names of all participants in the interview, noteworthy observations, important facts, and any concerns that come to mind. Also list any follow-up actions you will need to take care of. Additionally, be sure to record any questions you thought of after the interview so you can ask them during subsequent contacts.

During your review of the interview it will also be helpful to think about how you handled the experience. How did you respond to the questions asked? Were the questions you asked effective in eliciting the information you were seeking? What might you do differently in the next interview? Thinking carefully about these issues will do much to help you prepare for future interviews.

- **Send a thank you letter**

Sending a letter of appreciation shortly after the interview can be very helpful. It allows you to express gratitude, and it reminds the interviewer of your continued interest in being considered for the position. It also allows you to supply any additional information that might be helpful to the interviewer and to emphasize any important points that were brought out during the interview. Although there may be several things you want to accomplish with the letter, it is important that you keep it brief.

- **If necessary, make a follow-up contact with the interviewer**

Hopefully, the interviewer has given some indication of how soon you will hear back from him. However, the period of waiting for that contact can be an anxious time. It is helpful to keep in mind that search committees often require a considerably longer period of time than they anticipate to conduct their work. Try to be patient. Allow them several extra days before doing anything.

After an appropriate amount of time, if you feel it is important to initiate a follow-up contact, be very tactful in your approach. Don't be demanding, and don't put the interviewer on the defensive. Instead of bluntly asking where they are in the process, indicate that you are writing or calling as a follow-up to see if they are in need of any additional information. As they respond to that inquiry, they will very likely tell you the status of the search process and their consideration of you.

INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

- ☐ Research information about the church or ministry organization
- ☐ Carefully review the position description
- ☐ Review information contained in résumé
- ☐ Prepare to summarize how gifts, skills, experience, etc. relate to the position
- ☐ Think about responses to potential questions
- ☐ Prepare list of questions to ask interviewer
- ☐ Double check date and time of interview
- ☐ Review directions to interview's location
- ☐ Review name and title of interviewer
- ☐ Take extra copies of résumé
- ☐ Have a list of references
- ☐ Take pen and notepad for taking notes
- ☐ Give careful attention to grooming
- ☐ Wear clean, neatly-pressed, appropriate clothing
- ☐ Arrive fifteen minutes before scheduled appointment time
- ☐ Think consciously about appropriate attitudes
- ☐ Concentrate on listening skills
- ☐ Send a thank-you letter following the interview
- ☐ Review the interview

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

AS THE CANDIDATE YOU MAY BE ASKED ABOUT...

Your personal background –

- “a little about yourself”
- where you grew up
- your family
- hobbies, interests, how you spend your spare time
- your personality
- your interpersonal skills
- what motivates you for ministry
- your health

Your spiritual pilgrimage –

- conversion experience
- spiritually-shaping life experiences
- call to ministry
- personal devotional life
- how you pursue spiritual growth
- books you have read recently

Your abilities in ministry –

- spiritual gifts
- strengths for ministry
- weaknesses in ministry
- your most significant accomplishments in ministry
- ability to work with people
- leadership style
- how you approach personal evangelism

Your preparation for ministry –

- educational background, especially your ministerial training
- details related to the focus of your ministerial training
- ministerial experience (positions, responsibilities, successes, etc.)
- important lessons learned about ministry from previous experience
- your evaluations of your success in ministry
- how you stay informed about new developments in ministry and church-related matters
- any future plans for additional education

Your theological and philosophical views –

- views on various doctrines and theological issues
- views on various social issues
- views regarding church polity
- philosophy or basic views on your area of ministry
- the focus, and various emphases, of your ministry

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS *(continued)*

Your family –

- information about your spouse and children (their work, school, etc.)
- your spouse's feelings about ministry
- how you balance the demands of ministry and family

Various other matters –

- what you consider to be the ideal position for you
- what makes you most qualified for the position under consideration
- what you have enjoyed most about ministry
- what you have enjoyed least about ministry
- how you handle criticism
- how you handle conflict
- how you deal with the pressures of ministry
- future vocational goals (where you see yourself in five years; in ten years...)
- personal goals for your area of ministry
- types of “programs” you might implement
- ways you involve others in ministry
- how you view the role of senior pastor
- your views regarding worship
- your views regarding missions
- why you left your last position
- your relationship to the denomination
- your involvement in the broader Christian community
- community involvement
- your financial expectations related to the position
- how you feel about the position for which you are being considered
- how long you would be willing to commit to this ministry opportunity
- what your family thinks about this ministry opportunity
- specific items on your résumé

YOU MAY WANT TO ASK ABOUT. . .

Details related to the position –

- specific responsibilities of the position
- how performance of the responsibilities will be evaluated
- to whom you will report
- history of the position or ministry in the church
- church's philosophy and expectations related to the ministry position
- goals the church has for this ministry position
- what matters need to be addressed most immediately in this position
- why former ministers left the position
- details related to working conditions
- support services provided for the ministerial staff
- typical daily schedule
- provisions for continuing education
- the church's personnel policies

Information related to the church –

- mission statement of the church
- history of the church
- size of the congregation (membership, worship and Sunday School attendance, etc.)
- growth pattern of the congregation in the last five years
- make-up of the congregation (in demographic terms)
- spiritual life of the congregation
- the church's outreach program
- strengths of the church
- issues currently facing the congregation
- the church's constitution and bylaws
- the church's budget and financial report
- samples of church publications
- dreams/goals of the church
- church's long range plans
- things the church would like to change about itself
- the church's style of worship
- how effectively the church ministers to various age groups
- the church's specific ministries to various age groups

Information related to the church leadership –

- current composition of the staff
- history of all staff positions for the last several years
- quality of relationships among staff members
- quality of relationships between staff members and the congregation
- the role of deacons in the church
- the church's committee structure
- the role of laypersons in developing a strong church

YOU MAY WANT TO ASK ABOUT. . .

Information about the church's context for ministry –

- the nature of the community (population, growth, demographics, trends, etc.)
- how the church ministers to the needs of its community
- the image the church has in the community
- church's relationship to other churches
- church's involvement with the association, state convention, and denomination

Various other matters –

- the church's positions on doctrinal issues
- the church's positions on various social issues
- any issues over which the church has experienced division
- any problems the church has experienced related to this position
- new ministries the church has initiated in the last few years
- how receptive the church is to change
- how the church processes change
- whether the church has previously terminated ministerial staff; if so, why
- church's expectations of spouses of ministerial staff
- the church's process for calling ministerial staff
- how soon a decision will be made about calling someone to this position



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